

TAPE INDEXNARRATOR Mr. "Jack" RossINTERVIEWER Phyllis LotzPLACE Zaca Lake

DATE October 25, 1980

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Interview with Jack Ross, Interview 1  
Date of Interview: 25 October 1980 ; Zaca Lake  
Interviewer: Phyllis Lotz  
Transcriber: Phyllis Lotz  
Begin Tape Side 1

PL: Mr. Ross, when did you come to California?

Ross: I came from New Mexico out here. Went to work on the Alisal. I came on a regular old four stage from Gav-iota to the Alisal Ranch.

PL: How did you hear about a job at the Alisal?

Ross: I got the job in Los Angeles. We went to the employment agency. I was standing around there, a couple of us, J.E. Murphy owned the ranch at this time. And he came up there, walked up and said, "Are you boys looking for work?" Yes, we need to eat so I guess we work, so then he wanted to know if we had worked on a farm. I said, "oh, sure, thats where both os us were raised." So he said, "Lets see your hands." We had been switching on the Santa Fe for two years, on the railroad, and had big calluses on our hands climbing up and down the box cars. So he said, "Yep, you bosy are used to hard work."

PL: How old were you at this time?

Ross: I was 19. I went to work at the Chino Copper on the switch engine when I was 17. I had been poll taxed and that kind of stuff and you had to be 21 to work there. I naturally said that I was older. There was another kid that went to school with me and we were working at the Chino Copper Co. and I said to him, "My god, there must be someplace in the United States that is different than down here." So I said, "Lets go the California." He said OK. So we went to Denning, New Mexico and caught a freight train, rode the rods all the way out to Los Angeles. We went up to see the SP RAILroad about going to work, we had letters as railroad men, and they said they would put us on the extra board out at Mohave, I looked at Jess and said, "I've had desert enough for me." We looked for something else. So we went to the employment agency and met Mr. Murphy. He sent us up to Gav-



iota and to the Alisal.

PL: Mr. Murphy owned the Alisal at this time?

Ross: Yes, J.L. Murphy. I don't know who he bought it from. We raised cattle, there was no dude ranch then. Strictly a cattle ranch. The ranch is 10,500 acres. There were 6 or 7 (men) there and quite a lot of farm land. Where the golf course is now, that was barley fields.

PL: What buildings were on the ranch?

Ross: Bunk house, dining hall that was in the kitchen of the ranch house. The ranch house is still there on the left side after you pass the creek, that was the original ranch house. There were teamsters. I came up there and started taking care of the cattle. They raised from 1100 to 1300 head. Every day in and out.

PL: You had worked on a cattle ranch before?

Ross: Oh, yes, I was raised on a cattle ranch in New Mexico. I ran away from home when I was 16 and went to the Bell Ranch in New Mexico. It was a ranch that was 32 miles square and there they had about 20 men working on the ranch. I was there for one year. Drove what is called a hoodlum wagon, that carries the beds, firewood, for the cook, you see I was just a kid.

PL: What were your wages at the Alisal?

Ross: Thirty dollars a month and room and board. They handed you a lantern, and said that your bed. We worked before dawn and went to bed after dark.

PL: Did you work with the Lopez Boys?

Ross: Oh, yes. Pete Lopez. I was up in Santa Ynez when he was killed. There were about eight of us out there. The old constable had forbidden us to come to town because we drank beer. In them days you could buy a barrel of beer, 72 quarts in a flour barrel. We went up to Santa Ynez with this barrel of beer and sat in the middle of the street to show this constable that we could. Frank Knight was his name. So we were drinking and he tried to bust up the party. He had a deputy named Wilson with him, we got to our feet in case we had to fight. He said something to Pete and shot into the air but he did not shoot



high enough and hit Pete right in the forehead, killed him immediately. They gave Wilson 14 years for that. He had no business shotting, We were having fun.

PL: What was Santa Ynez like in those days?

Ross: It was pretty wild, Santa Ynez was. We used to have an old fellow there, and when he got drunk he would hollar, "The white snakes are out." He would go up and down the street. That was quite a place. We had nothing else to do on the ranch. We had a set of boxing gloves and after five o'clock we would put these gloves on and box. Then on Saturday night we would go to a dance and see if we had learned anything. I carried a deputy sheriff's badge for 14 years and it came in pretty handy. This was when I was still a cowboy. I went into World War I and when I came back I started a garage in Solvang, the Chevrolet Garage, had it 23 years and that was when I was the Sheriff. The merchants in Solvang wanted someone deputized so if any trouble started they could call someone to help. Right after the war I went back to the Alisal and worked there. The foreman gave me two men and we gathered up wild hogs. I got 3200 hogs. They were selling then at San Luis. See, the narrow gauge used to come into Los Olivos and we would catch these hogs with dogs, there were three of us and we put them in corrals until we had enough to make a car load and then take flat racks and haul them to Los Olivos and load then on the train.

PL: Tell me about your war years?

Ross: I was with the 91st. Chateau-Thierry was the first battle I was in and then we were at the Argonne, I was hit in the Argonne Forest. I was in the hospital for three months and came home the 8th of October. I ate Christmas dinner in New York. Mr. Murphy was still owner of the Alisal, I met his foreman at Las Cruces and he got to taking with me. I had a job offer at the Gillette Mines over there driving teams, but the foreman asked me to go back to work, said I was the only one to catch 'those damn hogs.'

PL: Was it profitable to catch these pigs?



Ross: Oh yeh, I never did ask what they got for them but I know they got money for them. And they were getting them off the land. In the spring time after the rains those damn hogs would root up acre after acre of ground turning the grass over so the cattle could not eat it.

PL: Who were some of the cowboys you worked with at the Alisal?

Ross: Claud Murphy, and I got Indians out of Santa Ynez to help. One was Guerremo and Yarnus, they were two old Indians I got to work. We used to drive 120 four year old steers every year off that ranch and drive them to Gaviota, load them on to the train and ship them out.

PL: How many on a drive like that?

Ross: Three of us, one at the head and two, to keep them going.

PL: How long did it take you to get to Gaviota?

Ross: Start at daylight, and get there by 3 p.m.. Into holding pens and all that stuff and the cattle went to Los Angeles to the Wilson Cattle Co. for beef. I had to make two hog drives over there, 250 hogs in the drive. They weren't ours, they were Franzini's from the next ranch, southeast of the Alisal. We had a man with a wagon and when a hog got tired we'd throw him into the wagon.

\* End of first side, first tape.

\* Begin tape, second side

I married an ol gal in Solvang and her brother had the garage there. Gerta Rasmussen. So then the government sent me to school for getting scratched up. I married her before I went down there. He(the brother) died about four months after I took over the garage.

PL: Did you have mechanical abilities before you took over?

Ross: You see, I was scratched up during the war and the government sent me through school in Los Angeles for 18 months in mechanics. I put in a year and they paid me \$125 a month, to live and gave me all my books. At the end of a year this ol boy with the gov't said, well do you think you have learned anything and I said yep, and he said do you want to get out. I could have stayed more, \$125 in 1921 was good money. I came back to Solvang, I liked the area and had the Chevrolet agency for 23 years. Sold cars and repaired them. I sold to Old Man Kelsev. I would



car to drive.

PL: What was Solvang like in the early days?

Ross: There were 7 or 8 houses there and a little gracery store, on Alisal Drive. Jens Rasmussen has that store now. There used to be a big oak tree there. Ol Marcus Nielsen had the stpre, under the oak tree. Marcus was quite a boy. He never put out a nickel. I remember when I wanted to put down some new pumps at the garage. Old Marcus had the water works and they caome down this way and cut across. I was digging as I wanted to put in two gas tanks. I went to him and told him the water pipes lay right in my way. He said the pipes were there for 18 years and they were going to stay. I told him there wasn't anythin that could keep me from cutting them in two. And the next morning he came over there and changed the pipe. He was on private property.

PL: What about Axel, his son?

Ross: He was younger that I was. Alex was alright but I never liked him. Axel built the store east of town where it is now. Chara Nielsen married George Petersen and thats why then called it(the store) Nielsen and Petersen. I lived in town. I sold the garage. The location was where Svengaard Hotel is now. I owned the whole corner there. I had a new house built on Willow.

PL: What do you think of Solvang now?

Ross: A different atmosphere now like you don't dare leave any thing around today.

PL: What about the (Indian) reservation, do you remember Willie Miranda?

Ross: There was an old one armed Indian there for years who was the Chief. I don't remember his name. He would get drunk sometimes and I would take him home. Once Art Henning was out in front of the danch hall, just dancing by himself on the street when old Frank came out and was going to put him in jail. I saw what was happening so I got in front of Frank and said no, so Frank turned him loose.

PL: When were you born?

Ross: I was born December 10, 1894. There were eight children



in the family. I got mixed up with my Dad and so left home. He was going to give me a licken and I waid he wasn't. We made up later on. He was in the hospital in New Mexico so I went down there to Springer. He had to have medicine and I said to the druggist, "give me Dad whatever he wants and mail me the statement." Solvang? and I said yep, he said, "Do you know a druggist named Parsons?" Sure I did. He said they had married sisters.

PL: Anything more you can tell me about the Alisal?

Ross: The Alisal was profitable, the old man was a corporation lawyer in LA. J. Elmer Murphy. It was just a sideline. He paid \$75,000 for the ranch but some guy had gotten into a jam who had bought it, and thats why the old man got it in the first place. It paid, so he kept it. He would come up three or four times a year and at Christmas. His foreman was George Alex, that could neither read or write so I would write letters for him. He was from Kansas

PL: What are you doing these days?

Ross: I have a boat on Cachuma and I fish for trout. I know where to go and others are following me to see where I go. I was here long before the dam was built. The steelhead would come up. We did need the water and we can get along without the fish. The Alisal had springs where the cattle could get water.

Thank you for the interview, Mr. Ross.